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Nineteen years ago today John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. It was the public event of the age. Probably every American over the age of 40, perhaps every one over the age of 30, remembers vividly the moment the news flash came. The television networks cancelled all their regular programs for endless reporting on the tragedy and its aftermath. During that aftermath there was for the first and only time ever live coverage of a murder-in-progress—Jack Ruby's shooting of the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, in the basement of the Dallas City Hall.

Some readers did not get to the words "in the basement of the Dallas City Hall" in that paragraph. As soon as they read "assassin, Lee Har—" they dropped the newspaper to take pen in hand, or horsewhip, in order to convince this writer that Oswald didn't kill Kennedy. Nearly 20 years after the fact, there are still a few million Americans who do not believe Oswald did it.

There are many, many millions who do not believe he did it

Oswald Innocent

alone. In the week of November 22-27, 1963, Gallup found that 29 percent of Americans believed one man acting alone killed Kennedy; 52 percent believed it was a group action. In 1976, after the Warren Commission report and scores of sensational books, Gallup asked the question again

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and found that only 11 percent believed there was a lone assassin; 81 percent believed it was a conspiracy involving Cubans or American politicians or Communists or the CIA or the Mafia or Russians or special-interest groups.

If Oswald had lived to be tried, the facts would have come out

and suspicions put to rest, some trial lawyers say.

Maybe. Maybe not. Joe H. Tonahill, a trial lawyer from Jasper, Texas, says, "Oswald would have been acquitted of murdering the president." For the record he believes Oswald did it, but he also believes that proving that in a courtroom would have required using statements by his wife, Marina, which would not have been admissible in a trial under Texas law at that time, and of using material evidence, such as photographs and papers police obtained by conducting an illegal search and seizure, also not admissible under prevailing U.S. Supreme Court opinions.

Scoff if you like, but you should know that Tonahill was one of Jack Ruby's lawyers. Ruby's conviction was reversed on appeal, on grounds that inadmissible evidence was used at his trial. Millions saw him shoot Oswald. He admitted it freely. But in the eyes of the law, he was an innocent man when he died waiting retrial.

—Theo Lippman, Jr.